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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND LFREEMAN AND INR JYAPHE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN: SUDDEN QUIET IN SA'ADA AS ROYG AND REBELS  
AGREE TO CEASEFIRE

REF: SANAA 203

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. President Saleh and rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi agreed to suspend hostilities and began to implement a ceasefire agreement at midnight on February 12. After weeks of behind-the-scenes negotiations, it appears that the reconciliation and reconstruction process has begun to inch forward. Observers are hopeful that a joint Yemeni-Houthi-Saudi mediation commission, which reportedly began its thorny work on the morning of February 12, will make progress in demilitarizing war-torn Sa'ada and beginning the lengthy process of rebuilding northern Yemen. Although both sides appear to be in synch in their desire to end the current round of fighting, the long-term success of the ceasefire agreement will require a concerted, patient effort by both the government and the Houthis to move forward together. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) After weeks of a rumored end to the sixth round of fighting between the ROYG and Houthi rebels that began in August (reftel), President Saleh made a televised announcement on February 11 that a ceasefire would take effect at midnight on February 12. According to a statement posted at 12:38 AM on Houthi media outlet almenpar.net, rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi ordered all fighters to "cease fire at the time announced by the government, and after the stabilization of the ceasefire, the roads will be opened, checkpoints lifted and forces withdrawn from the mountains." Although reports of fighting and casualties continued through mid-week, local observers, the media and post contacts all reported that Sa'ada had been quiet since the morning of February 11. Local independent media outlet Mareb Press called the president's announcement "the end of the longest and bloodiest round of fighting between the Houthis and the government since the inception of the war in 2004."

13. (C) On February 6, the ROYG presented the Houthis with a timetable for implementing the six-point ceasefire plan, which Houthi accepted on February 8. (Note: The length of the timetable remains unknown. The six conditions required of the Houthis are: withdrawal from government buildings, removal of roadblocks, return of seized weapons, freeing of prisoners, abandoning mountain positions and cessation of attacks on Saudi Arabia. End Note.) A possible facilitator of the agreement was the removal of individuals seen by President Saleh as standing in the way of a settlement: In early February, Houthi mediator Hassan Zayd, the al-Haq party secretary general who Saleh villainized as a disingenuous Houthi supporter, was replaced with Sheikh Ali Nasser Qirshah. On February 5, Sa'ada Governor Hassan Manna, brother of recently arrested arms dealer Faris Manna, was replaced by Taha Abdullah Hajer. Local media and post

contacts also suggested that the ceasefire was a result of perceived pressure on both the ROYG and the Houthis generated by the January London conference on Yemen and the upcoming meeting in Riyadh in late February.

#### PICKING UP THE PIECES

14. (C) The mediation commission appointed by President Saleh and comprised of members of Parliament, the Shoura Council and the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) was on its way to Sa'ada in the early morning hours of February 12, local journalist Mohammed al-Ghobari told PolOff. Ghobari added that the commission would be joined in Sa'ada by representatives from the Houthis as well as Saudi Arabia, which has been fighting the rebels since November. Presidential Advisor Dr. Abdulkarim al-Eryani announced on February 6 that the mediation commission would be comprised of five committees, each tasked with a different aspect of the reconciliation and reconstruction process: reopening roads, Houthi withdrawal from key positions, return of the 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), release of prisoners held in connection to the conflict and dealing with the social consequences of the war to prevent future rounds of conflict. Eryani reportedly traveled to Doha with news of the ceasefire and plans to discuss the possibility of securing financial support for reconstruction from the Qatari government, according to local media reports. (Note: Qatar was heavily involved in mediating the ceasefire and financing reconstruction after the 2007 round of fighting in Sa'ada. End Note.)

#### WILL IT LAST?

15. (C) The current ceasefire appears to have the momentum needed to end fighting and move forward on a mutually agreeable framework. "Both sides were exhausted and waiting for just such an arrangement to halt the fighting," Ghobari said. Presidential Advisor for Sa'ada Affairs Mohammed Azzan, who has been intimately involved in mediating the Sa'ada conflict for years, told PolOff on February 12 that he was "finally hopeful that things are moving in the right direction." Azzan pointed out that President Saleh's direct involvement in the form of a nationally televised announcement, lengthy meetings with members of the mediation commission and detailed attention to recent negotiations were positive indicators of the seriousness of the ceasefire. ROYG military contacts told EmbOffs in recent days that they were already making plans to begin moving some troops out of Sa'ada in anticipation of the ceasefire. In a February 11 press conference, the JMP called for a ceasefire in Sa'ada as the first step to a comprehensive national cure for the effects of war and an end to the suffering of displaced persons, according to Islah-affiliated al-Sahwa news.

#### COMMENT

16. (C) Even in their acceptances of the ceasefire framework, both sides warned that its success was contingent on the other side's continued commitment to the process. Although the government and the Houthis have for many weeks said they are prepared to end hostilities, the choreography of a ceasefire agreement has been complicated, with neither side wanting to commit itself first. It appears, finally, that the Houthis and the ROYG are now willing partners in this process. The success of reconciliation and reconstruction, however, will require the two sides to move forward together, shedding suspicion of the others' intentions as they proceed.

END COMMENT.

SECHE